



GARDEN NOTES

GARDENING MYTH INFORMATION

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Like the miracle diet and the instant baldness cure, most gardening myths sound too good to be true because they are, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. He lists his top five.

Myth #1. Top soil bought from somewhere else is always better than the existing soil. Top soil is a vague commodity. Defining it as "that soil on the top," does not specify what kind of soil it is. Purchased top soil may range from heavy clay to a gravelly sand type. Most native soils are as good as any top soil that can be purchased -- they simply need to be worked with.

The best way to improve the soil in your landscape is to work in organic matter. Leaves, grass clippings, sawdust, straw, manure and peat moss provide drainage, loosen the tightly bound particles, increase the nutrient and water-holding capacities and improve the overall tilth of the soil.

Myth #2. There is a perfect tree. Every tree has some good and bad characteristics. Some trees have more problems than you can shake a dead aspen at, while others have more redeeming qualities. When looking for that perfect tree, do a little research, and make sure you can tolerate the negatives of that variety.

If you can find a tree that has no insect or disease problems, provides colossal shade in just two years, does not have roots in the lawn and rakes up after itself in the fall, buy it and then get right to work on world peace.

Myth #3. There is an easy way to control morning glory (field bindweed). I am often asked what to use to control field bindweed. Besides asphalt, there is no easy answer - and even it is only a temporary fix.

It takes time and effort to control some weeds and usually requires a combination of different methods. Spray them with a registered herbicide (like 2,4-D and Roundup) in the spring and fall, use a thick mulch wherever possible, mechanically remove them with a hoe and then pray. Keep at it every year, and eventually the problem will be more manageable.

Myth #4. If a plant looks sick, apply extra fertilizer so it will outgrow the problem. This is like forcing someone with the stomach flu to consume a greasy cheeseburger. Although some plants may look bad because they are nutrient deficient and need fertilizer, most sick plants are

not helped with an extra dose.

When a plant looks sick or diseased, figure out what the problem is, then treat it correctly. There are many good sources to help you diagnose a problem, including a Utah certified nursery person at your favorite garden center, the Internet, books and most county Extension offices can direct you to a diagnostic clinic in your area. Remember, diagnose first, then treat.

Myth #5. If a plant starts to wilt, apply enough water to float a small battleship. In reality, more plants are killed from too much water than from too little. When a plant is over-watered the roots lose the ability to collect and move moisture. Roots need as much oxygen (for respiration) as they do water. Also, excess water promotes root rot, which reduces the root's ability to function properly.

When a plant is over-watered and cannot take up water, it naturally starts to wilt. Seeing the plant droop, its owner automatically applies more water, which just aggravates the problem. Before watering more, dig down four to six inches into the soil around the plant to make sure the problem is a lack of water.

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